

6. Utah Homeless or 'Transients'?

Are homeless people in Utah mostly refugees from surrounding states attracted here by better services? We've gone to some length to try to at least partially answer that question. The *Utah Code Annotated 1953* in two places defines residency as having lived in the state for thirty days,¹ and in a third place, under "Human Services," speaks more specifically to the population we're studying in this report:

To qualify for assistance under this chapter, an applicant must be living in Utah voluntarily with the intention of making this state his place of residence, and not for a temporary purpose.²

The first approach is a residency based on calendar days in the state, the second on self-declaration. This study asked questions based upon both methods.

Several questions were added to the point prevalence count of 31 July 1992 to delve further into the issue of local homeless versus out-of-state homeless.³ The 31 July 1992 queries trying to count out-of-state homeless was subjective: "How many were from out-of-state, but U.S. citizens?" This left it to the discretion of the provider or the individual to determine what "out of state" means. Still, allowing for local definition of point of origin, the question was later modified to read: "Of those who were **not** Utah residents, how many have been in Utah for:

0 - 30 days
Less than six months
Six months to a year
One to two years
More than two years

¹Volume 3A, 1991 Replacement, Title 18 to Title 24 (Charlottesville, Va.: The Michie Company, 1991); §20-2-11.1 through 20-2-14 (a reference to 30-day residency for purposes of voting), and §46-1-3 (a reference to 30-day residency to be a notary public).

²§62A-9-115.

³The survey instrument did not define "out of state" or residency. Travelers Aid Society (TAS), the state's largest homeless shelter provider, noted that "guests were asked to name the last state of residence prior to coming to Utah," but explained "when collecting data for statistical reports, TAS defines a Utah resident as someone who has been in Utah for 30 days or more. During FY 91-92, 66 percent of single men in the men's shelter fit the definition of Utah resident"--that is, they'd been in Utah long enough to be able to vote.

If a person has been in the state for more than six months, they meet all Utah residency requirements. Armed with the new question, on 31 January 1993 we found that providers reported 10 percent of their guests were not residents. On 31 July 1993 we found that 86 percent of sheltered homeless persons on the night of 31 July 1993 were clearly Utahns—they had been in Utah more than six months. The following residency patterns are established by our point prevalence counts:

<u>Date</u>	<u>% Identified as "U.S. Citizens from out of State"</u>
01/31/93	18%
01/31/94	39%
01/31/95	
01/31/96	31%
01/31/97	16%
01/31/98	25%

We do have earlier studies which tell us more about the place of origin of Utah's homeless, beginning with the 1986 study, *Homelessness in Utah: Utah Homeless Survey: Final Report*. That *Report* stated that 22 percent of the homeless interviewed that winter had been in Utah for six months or more, as compared to 33 percent of those interviewed during summer months. This suggested an 11 percent increase in out-of-state homeless during the summer months.

Additional numbers came from a 30 July 1991 survey done by the State Health Department, which printed preliminary data on 435 homeless persons as part of a tuberculosis screening program in Salt Lake City *only*. The information gathered was quite extensive and addressed the question of increased out-of-state homeless during the summer months.⁴

The survey asked how long those screened had been in Utah, and their previous state of residence. Of the 435 homeless persons surveyed, 146 or 34 percent failed to respond to the question. Of the remaining 289, 39 percent had been in Utah for less than six months, 13 percent between six months and a year, and 17 percent between one and five years.

Travelers Aid Society, the largest homeless shelter provider in the state, logged in the points of origin for homeless guests between 1 July 1994 and 10 January 1995 without asking how long guests had been in Utah. They found that 132 single men were originally from California, 43 from Colorado, 158 from Nevada (122 from Las Vegas), 151 from various Utah destinations, and the rest from other states and countries. Travelers Aid's women's shelter showed 13 from California, 23 from Nevada, and 65 from Utah, with the rest scattered across the United States. In the family shelter there were ten families from Arizona, eight from California, 42 from Utah, and the remainder from other states.⁵ About two-thirds of homeless single men who were Utahns in this study came Salt Lake City and the rest from Ogden, West Valley City, and Provo. The women's shelter residents from Utah were mostly from Salt Lake City, with the rest scattered from Montezuma Creek in the southeast to Ft. Duchense in the northeast, Cedar City in the southwest, and as far north as Ogden.⁶

⁴Health Care Coordinating Committee for Homeless Individuals, *TB Homeless Data* (July 30, 1991), pp. 4-5, 24-25.

⁵Printout received from Maun Alston in early 1995.

⁶Travelers Aid Society, "Point of origin count for 07/01/94 to 01/10/95 [*sic*, 1994]".

The length of stay in Utah shelters varies greatly according to gender. Of those who had been in the state for less than six months, 87 percent were men. In addition, men made up 76 percent of the homeless population that had been in Utah for six months to one year. Homeless women did not move as frequently. Homeless women who had been in the state for one year or less made up only 26 percent of the homeless women's population. Twenty-seven percent of the homeless women had been in the state between one year and five years and the remaining 47 percent had been in Utah for more than five years.

Length of stay also varies according to race. The minority homeless seemed to stay shorter lengths of time in Utah than did white homeless. Hispanic homeless far outnumbered the remaining homeless minorities (15 percent, followed by African-Americans at 6 percent). Of those Hispanics that responded to the survey, 62 percent had been in the state for less than six months. Perhaps this suggests an influx of migrant workers during the agricultural season. Of the Native Americans who reported their length of stay in Utah, 67 percent had been in Utah for six months or less. Of the minority homeless, African-Americans had remained in Utah the longest; 67 percent of homeless African-Americans had been in the state for more than one year.

It is also interesting to note the previous residencies of the out-of-state homeless. Data collected in the survey conducted by the State Health Department showed that 41 percent reported their previous state of residence as a state bordering Utah. By far, the single most mentioned state was California, with 24 percent declaring it as their previous state of residence. California was followed by Texas with 6 percent, and Florida was a distant third with 4 percent.

The major influx of homeless persons in our point prevalence counts had come from both California and Nevada. Of those homeless reporting to have been in Utah for six months or less, 25 percent reported California as their previous state of residence and 26 percent reported Nevada as theirs. Florida, once again, was a distant third with 8 percent.

We can compare this with data compiled by Wasatch Homeless Health Care for the first eleven months of 1993: 63.3 percent (N = 1,283) of the male patients reporting had been in Utah six months or more, similar to the 65.1 percent of female patients who met a six month or more residency.⁷ All of this together suggests that a conservative estimate is about two-thirds of the homeless are long-time Utah residents.

Although national homeless organizations are quick to dismiss theories that the homeless are attracted to states because of the quality of their homeless facilities, they do concede that they may indeed be attracted to states offering employment possibilities. Utah, having been spared the brunt of the recent recession, no doubt is viewed as offering greater employment opportunities than other neighboring states. The unemployment rate in Utah was 4 percent in 1990 and only 4.9 percent in both 1991 and 1992, but by the end of 1993 this had dropped to 3.4 percent.⁸ Higher than normal numbers of sheltered homeless from out-of-state may partly reflect a booming economy. The first sentences of the executive summary of the *Economic Report to the Governor* explains: "after last year's economic performance was characterized as stunning, economists postulated that 1994 would again be a strong year, albeit somewhat slower growth than in 1993. Instead, 1994 took off even stronger than 1993 and job growth sailed even higher, with the estate creating 50,000 net new jobs and leading the nation in the job growth rate for the second year in a row."⁹ What is less generally reported is that the cost of living in Utah is also outdistancing that of the United States.¹⁰

One myth about the homeless is that they are unemployed. Our point prevalence counts, excluding children, show:

⁷See "Table 2. Selected Demographics and Other Information N = 4,325 Homeless Patients N -1 9,928 Medical Encounters Seen From January 1, 1993 - November 30, 1993 Wasatch Homeless Health Care Program, SLC Utah, December 27, 1993."

⁸Richard W. Newman and Kris Beckstead, *Annual Report of Labor Market Information 1991* (Salt Lake City: Utah Department of Employment Security, October 1992), p. 1; Newman and Beckstead, *Annual Report of Labor Market Information 1992* (Utah Department of Employment Security, October 1993), p.1; Richard W. Newman and Kris Beckstead, *Annual Report of Labor Market Information 1993* (Utah Department of Employment Security, October 1994), p. 1.

⁹Also see "Utah's Unemployment Rate Increases to 3.5 percent in March, says State," *Ogden Standard Examiner*, April 2, 1994. Utah's 3.5 percent compares with the U.S. rate of 6.5; and see "Jobless Rate Remains Below 50 percent of U.S. Average," *Daily Spectrum* (St. George), January 8, 1994. Richard W. Newman and Kris Beckstead's *Annual Report of Labor Market Information 1993* (Salt Lake City: October 1994) gives further information on these trends.

¹⁰"Utah Cost of Living Outpaces U.S.," *Ogden Standard Examiner*, October 17, 1994.

<u><i>Year</i></u>	<u><i>% Employed</i></u>
07/31/91	22%
07/31/92	26%
07/31/93	33%
07/31/94	39%
07/31/95	30%
07/31/96	25%
07/31/97	22%
07/31/98	40%

Of those from out of state, we found various points of origin in the counts where this question had been asked, but with a predominance from the west.

The out-of-state homeless in our shelters were drawn to Utah for several reasons, but only between three and ten percent of sheltered homeless people are said to have been drawn to Utah because we have "better [homeless] facilities." All of this suggests that Utah homelessness is primarily a problem for Utahns, though of course national trends have an impact.

In the counts where there are questions of citizenship, between one and three percent of the sheltered homeless turn out not to be U.S. citizens: of those, between 53 and 97 percent are from Latin America. Anecdotal information suggests that illegal immigrants, particularly homeless illegal immigrants, are sometimes treated brutally and viciously exploited. Studies of this dilemma have yet to be performed and are hindered by general hostility toward these people and the risks they would take in making complaints about their circumstances.